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AFTER
THE FLOOD

GENE STRATTON-PORTER

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AFTER THE FLOOD

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By

GENE STRATTON PORTER

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AFTER THE FLOOD



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CHAPTER I

HOW THE FIRST CARDINAL GOT HIS RED COAT

JIM CROW had been feasting on green maize quite close to Cardinal Grosbeak's sitting-room in a stag sumac. When his corn meal was finished he perched on the fence that separated the field from the thicket, to polish his beak, and the Cardinal in his flaming suit, followed by a pair of his nestlings only two suns on wing, paused for a visit. Jim Crow gazed at Cardinal's brilliant plumage with envy.

"Trap me!" he cawed, "but I would love to know where you got that coat."

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“Have you never heard?” chipped Cardinal in surprise. “I thought you knew the history of every bird in the woods. We have been teaching our nestlings from their shells. Our young ones only two suns from their cradle know. Chipper, suppose you tell Jim Crow how the first Cardinal came to have a red coat.”

Chipper fluffed with importance. His mother was going to teach him the traditions of all the birds she knew, and she had begun with their own family. Her young ones so loved the story that they had made her repeat it until they could correct her if she varied in one note. It was delightful to be able to teach the wise Crow something, so he gripped the sumac limb, fluffed his feathers, flared his crest until it leaned forward and began:

“His name was 'ist only Grosbeak, 'cos he had such a big beak, and his coat was

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gray, all plain gray. It was right after the grea' big flood had drown all the other birds, except him and his mate, so right away, soon as the sun had dried things a little, they hurried up and built a sitting-room and went to work to raise more Grosbeaks, 'cos it was dreffle lonely with only two in the family. So they built a beau'ful nest and Mother Grosbeak was brooding, faithfully as ever she could, and Father Grosbeak got tired carrying food to her *all* the time, and he never could keep quiet, 'specially 'ist after being shut up in the big boat so long, so he think he'll take a little pleasure trip up the river, and his name was Grosbeak and his coat was gray, 'ist common gray.

“So he was flying close the river, and hopping from bush to bush, and chipping 'bout everything he saw, yes and two three times he got picked good, 'cos he chipped

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sweet chips at other birds' mates, and there wasn't only 'ist two of all and every kind there were, and all the males were taking the goodest care ever of their own mates, and if Father Grosbeak came hopping up sidewise to any female and whispered sof' and sweet, 'Dearie, dearie, dearie!' and her mate *heard* him, why nen Father Grosbeak have to fly like the wind, nelse he lose a good big beakful of feathers; but he don't ever care, 'cos very next bird he see, he hop straight and chip same thing to her, 'cos he can't help it, for his name Grosbeak and his coat was gray, 'ist gray.

"So he was flying up the river, and right there on the bank he saw the loveliest female ever, ever in all the world, 'cos she was Mother Nature, when she was *young*. Her eyes were 'ist sky blue, and her cheeks 'ist rose pink, and her lips 'ist fire red, and her beau'ful green dress 'ist float and wave

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around her—and there she sat. She was all tired out cleaning the grea' big flood off everything, 'cos she had to wash away the mud, and dry the ground, and start things growing again, and she thought she'd rest a little, so she sat on the bank, 'ist the loveliest ever, and while she rested she was making flowers to brighten the earth. She had some green stems sticked on the bank, where they could see themselves in the water, and she was making the beau'fulest little ragged flowers you ever saw and dipping them into a pot of red paint, and squeezing a drop of honey into each one of them, for the bees, and to make them all so sweet and smelly, and sticking them on the stems and when they were all finished they were cardinal flowers, and they were so pretty that when they saw themselves in the water they blushed redder than ever she maked them.

“Mother Nature was 'ist all so bright and

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happy; she was humming a little sof', murmury song, and smiling to herself, and cocking her head on one side to see if she was getting those flowers the very prettiest ever she could make them; and here came Father Grosbeak flying beside the river and saw *her!* And she 'ist so beau'ful, she took his breath away.

“He 'ist stop short and perch on a limb, and flare his crest, and flutter his wings, and try, and *try* to make her look at him; but she's so busy making the world fresh again, she ain't going to stop to pay 'tention to 'ist only one little gray bird; so she go on making her flowers, and dipping them into the red paint, and dropping in the sweetening, and sticking them on their stems. Father Grosbeak try over and over, but she don't even pay any 'tention 'tall. He 'ist think she so beau'ful he feel as if he'll fly to pieces if he can't make her look up soon, so he lean 'way

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over, and flare his crest, and spread his wings, and flutter and call to her sof' and loving as ever he can, 'Girlie, girlie, girlie!'

"Mother Nature never look up, but he watching 'ist drefle close, and he see her *hands* go slower, so he hop little closer, and spread himself little wider, and call little lovinger, 'Dearie, dearie, dearie!'

"Then Mother Nature stop short, and look straight *at* him and she *smile*, and *when* she smile, why *nen* she's beau'fuler 'an anything in the whole, whole world and Father Grosbeak feel so wild in his head, he hop right close to her, and 'ist rock, and flutter, and his feathers 'ist quiver, and his eyes 'ist gleam, and he 'ist beg and plead, all so sweet and loving, 'Come here, come here, come here!'

"Mother Nature she sit still holding one flower she 'ist dipped into the red paint, and trying to *petend* she don't *care*, but she *do*.

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She 'ist tickled half to death. She 'ist tickled so she have to listen, 'cos all and everybody been so busy cleaning away the flood, and getting ready to live on the ground again, they haven't had *time* yet to go out and *live* with her, and make up songs about her beauty, and write stories and poems about her, and paint pictures of her face, and tell her over and over how they love her, and what Father Grosbeak say sound so *new*, and so *good*,—she 'ist *have* to listen 'cos she only a female you know, and she get so flusterated she never see a big butterfly striped black and green, with long trailers, that had alighted in her lap and was feeling round after her honey, and her hand shake so she spill a drop of red paint right on one of his beau'ful back wings 'ist above the trailer.

“‘I thought I was finished, Mother,’ he telled her and she said, ‘You are, Ajax: I

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maked you handsome as ever I knew how.'

"And he said, 'Then why did you put that red on my wing?'

"And she said, 'Land o' love! If there is red on you, my hand shaked and I spilt it.'

"And he said, 'Take it off.'

"And she said, 'I can't take it off, 'cos it's in-*del-i-ble*.'

"And he said, 'Then what will I do?' I don't want one red spot on me.'

"And she said, 'Raise your wings above your back, Ajax, and hold them togever tight, and half that paint will stick to the other wing. Then spread them and sit in the sun until the paint dries and you will be two little specks better looking than you were before; and then you fly straight away, 'cos I haven't time to bother with little butterflies round my honey right now.' Then she smile at Grosbeak, and he go so *crazy* he come fly-

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ing full tilt and light right in her lap, and look into her face and 'ist sob and sing, 'So dear, so dear, so dear!'

"Mother Nature stir softly and bend over him so loving, and no bird ever know 'ist what she *was* going to do, 'cos here come his mate all so tired with brooding all night and no bath and no early worm, and see him sitting in Mother Nature's lap, singing to her the song Mother Grosbeak love best and she cry to him mighty cross, 'Chook! Chook! Why don't you come home and brood until I take my bath and find something to eat?' He 'ist sit there all stiff with fright, and his name was Grosbeak and his coat was gray, —'ist all plain, common gray.

"Mother Nature and Mother Grosbeak they 'ist *glare* at each other, and then quick as anything, Mother Nature grab Father Grosbeak and stick him splash into her red paint. Yes and she 'ist *hold* him there until

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every feather on him soaked good and red, and she hold him down, and *hold* him 'til he choke, and choke, and choke 'til he all *black in the face*. Then she lift him up, and brush away the clouds, and let the hot sun 'ist pour on him and dry him quick.

“Then she give him a sling and say, ‘There! You want to make love so *bad*, I’ll 'ist change you to love’s own color, so all and every bird in the woods will know you are a deceiver far as ever they see you coming.’

“Then she jump up and go sailing over the mountains, 'ist mad as *fire*, and leave Father Grosbeak sitting there shaking his head to get the paint from his mouth and turning redder and redder all the time.

“Mother Grosbeak came spluttering up and she cried, ‘Chook, chook! My dear, you are ruined!’ Then 'ist like a female she begin to chip it was all her fault, and rub him

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with her wings, and work to get the paint away with her feet and beak, and pretty soon she get it on her until she *tinged* with red herself. Father Grosbeak see what she doing and he chip, 'Look out! You getting it all over you!'

"Then she hurry to the water and bathe and soak and *try* to wash the red away, but she don't know that paint *in-del-i-ble* and won't come off ever. She 'ist think she got it off; then she come flying and seize Father Grosbeak by his wing and pull him to the water and try to push him in. He perch on a limb and lean to wash his mouth and then he first see his red coat. He so s'prised he almost fall into the river. He forget all about the bad taste in his mouth and begin to fluff, and flirt, and feather, and swell up and chip and chatter and he's so pleased.

"Mother Grosbeak think he gone crazy as a Loon. She scream at him, 'Chook, chook!'

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Get into the water and wash the dreffle stuff away quick. Hurry and take a bath!

“Father Grosbeak cry, ‘Chip, chip! Right away!’ And then if he doesn’t go sailing to the top of the very highest *tree* he can see and *spread* himself in the *sun* to dry the red in, faster, he’s so happy over his new coat, and he ’ist whistle, and scream, and cry to all the other birds, ‘See here! See here!’

“Mother Grosbeak so mad at the way he act, she ’ist *fight* to get a little red she see yet off *her* feathers. She scour her beak on the stones, and bite her toes, but she can’t ever, so at last she think if she don’t go back to her nest and brood all her eggs will be chilled.

“After a long time Father Grosbeak come to their sitting-room and he’s tickled so over over his red coat he ’ist jump, and flirt, and chip all the time; but he’s sorry Mother

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Grosbeak feel so *bad*, so he go kiss her and promise sure, he won't ever, never flirt with any other female *again*, and he never has; but always since he's been *black in the face*, and he's been name 'Cardinal,' 'cos his coat has been red, 'ist all the *brightest red ever*."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST CONCERT

AFTER the flood Wood Robin with his mate Bell, chose a damp, cool location beside the water, where pink mallows flowered and soft winds spiced with ink-colored pawpaw bloom waved the fringy willows. Here, among the wild grape that clambered over a giant sycamore they carefully built their sitting-room.

The very next day they heard a voice they recognized and Wood started to find exactly where it came from. He soon discovered that his cousin and only rival, Hermit Thrush and his mate the Swamp Angel were building their sitting-room across the

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little bay. They were working on a home in a tangle of button bushes, above which giant forest trees shut out most of the light, and beneath tall fern fronds and feathery marsh grasses waved over leaf-lined pools whose purple surfaces were broken by ragged patches of silver, where the light fell strongest and sentinel torches of fox fire flamed at the very edge of the water.

Wood went home appearing thoughtful.

“What is the trouble?” inquired Bell, as she tucked a piece of grape bark into the cradle lining.

“Cousin Hermit has settled in the button bushes just across the bay.”

“Lee! Lee!” exclaimed Bell. “I am delighted. With only one pair living of every family on earth, company is so scarce, we certainly are unusually blest in having a near relative so close.”

“If the musical reputation of the family

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depended on you, perhaps you would not be so pleased."

"Why not?"

"Lee! Lee! If you would take more interest in me and less in that cradle, you would understand."

"You forget, Wood, that on the outcome of this cradle rests the future of our family. If we do not produce a brood before anything happens to either of us, Hermit is left undisputedly the Prince of Song."

"Lee! Lee! I had forgotten that. But he is not the Prince of Song now, is he? Are not my notes more musical than his?"

"Of course I think so, but you may believe the Swamp Angel does not. Why don't you call the birds together to-night and challenge him to sing against you at a concert and allow them to decide once for all as to which is the sweeter singer?"

"Suppose they decide he is."

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“That will be no worse for us than it will for them if the majority decides on you. Solomon Owl has the reputation of being the wisest bird, Jim Crow the smartest, and Quaker Dove the most tender and truthful. Go ask them to come listen this evening, then arrange with Hermit to sing all your notes, one strain at a time, against each other and accept their decision as final. That will be perfectly fair to each of you, and I know who will win.”

So Wood Robin arranged for the rival concert, and, that evening when the last rays of the sun fell in long, red banners of light across the water and all the woods were quiet, he hopped from branch to branch of the sycamore, peered across the bay and listened intently. At last he fluffed his feathers, lifted his beak, swelled his throat and softly, oh, so softly sent this challenge over the water, “Uōlí? Uōlí?”

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Among the ferns across the purple water a soft wind carried the answer, indescribably sweet and faint, "O fear all!" Then stronger and clearer, "O fear all!" Then clear, high, cool and passionless from the button-bush that was his home rang the notes, "O fear all!"

Wood Robin's challenge was answered. He lifted his shoulders, his wing butts pressed his sides, his throat swelled fuller.

"Ā-ē-ō-l-ī!" Lovingly rounding, fulling, accenting each vibrant note he spelled it out with utmost care.

Immediately the Hermit raised to his pitch, and through the damp green silence of the wood, evenly, clearly, with molten sweetness poured the answer, "Oh, u-ō-lēē! Oh, u-ō-lēē!"

"Nōlī, nōlī!" flung back Wood Robin's silver-bell toned voice.

"Oh, klēr-ah-wäh! Klēr-ah-wäh!" rolled

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the serene, piercing sweetness of the Hermit.

Wood Robin's knees stiffened. His beak parted farther. He bent far toward his rival, and sweeter than the finest golden-toned flute struck his chords, "Ā-ē-ō-lēē, lēē, lee! Ā-ē-ō-lee, lēē, lēē!"

Then with a tense shiver he listened.

High, pure and clear, across the little bay swept the Hermit's melody, "O klēr-äh! O klēr-äh!"

Wood Robin stretched to his utmost height, filled his lungs and swelled his breast, pointed his beak Heavenward and in mellow cadence, rising higher and higher to piercing, painful sweetness, and then tenderly caressing each tone in the golden throat, he sank to a whisper and silence. "Uōlī? Uōlī? A-ē-ō-l-ē! Nōlī, nōl! A-ē-ō-lee! lēē! lēē!"

The Hermit gripped the twig he stood on,

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tucked his tail, lifted his beak, and in calm, even tones of pure serene sweetness, with delicate prelude, shaking trills and throbbing melody, poured his full strain in answer, "Oh, fear all! Fear all! Oh ū-ō-lēē! Oh ū-ō-lēē! O klěr-äh-wäh! O klěr-äh-wäh! O klěr-äh! Klěr-äh!"

Wood Robin closed his beak and hopping to a lower branch went before the judges for the decision. A little later he returned to Bell who anxiously awaited the answer.

"Have they agreed?" she chirped.

"They have all agreed," answered Wood Robin slowly.

"They are unanimous?"

"Yes."

"And it is—"

"They have decided that I can beat him on color and richness of tone; and that he has a serene purity that I cannot surpass."

"Lee, lee!" cried Bell. "I think that is

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lovely. Now neither of you can boast over the other. That means that some will like one of your songs best and some will care most for the other."

"That is what it means," replied Wood Robin.

CHAPTER III

A KINGFISHER QUARREL

“**U**RRRRRRRRR! Bless my bones!” rattled Billy Kingfisher on his flight from the river. He crossed the gravel pit, and sailed over the frog-pond lying below his front door, where he alighted in haste. “Whatever is all this noise about?”

“Urrr! Billy!” replied Minny, as she left their sitting-room and went down the long hall to meet him. “The twins persist in quarreling.”

“What an amazing thing!” exclaimed Billy. “When that boy-animal wrecked our sitting-room and broke five of our eggs with a stick, I was not utterly desolate.

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We could rebuild the walls, have omelet for breakfast, and it did seem that twins would be a rest after the families for which we have provided in previous seasons. But I never was more mistaken. This pair has the appetites of the seven we expected, and the more they eat, the faster they grow and the worse they behave. The boy will come again if they are not quiet."

"I do the best I can with them," explained Minny. "They are so full of life; and they are the cunningest nestlings we ever had."

"If you will remember, you think that every migration. I don't suppose these differ from the others. You notice them more because you have more time to look at them. How are they feathering?"

"Finely! Scarcely a pin shows in their suits. Having only the pair I am afraid we almost have stuffed them, and if there is any one thing I detest above all others, it is

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a stuffed bird. Of course their beaks and eyes will grow larger, and their crests flare higher, yet they surpass any youngsters I ever have seen now. They do have the broadest, snowiest collars. Spotty's breast-band is blue as his back, and Dotty's brown as a thrush. Their coats are blue as sky and her vest and her apron, lily white. We named them most appropriately. Every mark on Spotty is a small, irregular spot, and on Dotty is a perfectly round dot. And if I do mention it myself, I keep them clean. No birds can chatter that we are not immaculate, even living in a dug-out."

"Hear what Mummy sings about me?" inquired Dotty in the sitting-room.

"It is about me 'ist as much!" retorted Spotty indignantly.

"No such thing!" rattled Dotty. "My last lunch I had a minnow and a blackberry and the berry juice made the fish bones all

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black and when I guggiltated they flew against you and soiled your collar dreffully. You are not a clean bird."

"I am too!" answered Spotty, struggling to twist his head so that he could see his neck. "Mummy knows I am clean,—'sides, it's re-guggiltated, anyway!"

"I am going to have the next fish!" announced Dotty. "I will sit straighter, stick my bangs higher, and be cuter than you and Mummy will give it to me."

"I will be politest and she will give it to me," retorted Spotty. "You are always thinking about your looks."

"I am not!" rattled Dotty angrily. "'Always,' means all the time, and what I am thinking right now is,—that if Mummy goes fishing I will drive you to the front door and push you into the frog pond."

"Urrrrr! Dottie!" rattled Spotty reproachfully.

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“I will!” insisted Dottie stoutly. “And when you fall, kersplash! into the frog pond, the old frog Mummy will croak, ‘Shitepokes! What kind of new baby has rained down to me? I will be compelled to make this creature all over before it can live with us. There isn’t a thing about it will do for a frog except its eyes.’ Then she will take you and unpin every feather on you. She will strip you all bare naked, an’ the water will be so cold you’ll ’ist shiver an’ rattle dreffully.”

“Urrrrrrr, Dotty!” quavered Spotty.

Dotty proceeded remorselessly.

“Then you new frog Mummy will croak, ‘No one ever heard of a frog with a long beak. That must come off! Then she will take you to a rough stone an’ rub your bill against it an’ rub, an’ rub. It will hurt worse than all the fish bones that ever scratched you made into one big bone, mak-

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ing one big scratch, an' she won't ever care. She'll 'ist rub, an' rub, an' it will be suns an' suns before it all wears away. Nen you'll have a grea' big, wide-open frog mouth."

"I won't!" rattled Spotty.

"You will!" retorted Dotty with convincing calmness. "An' then she'll croak, 'My sun an' my song! Was there ever 'nother such frog? Here it is with fore legs three times too long and hind legs three times too short.' 'Nen she'll begin pushing your wings right back inside you, an' she'll push, an' push, an' push, 'til she makes little short frog fore legs out of them, so you'll never, never get to fly. All the time you'll 'ist rattle, an' rattle with the dreffle hurt of it. P'r'aps I'll sit in the front door an' watch an' I'll look down an' say, 'Now! Don't you wish you hadn't 'bused me?' "

"I ain't 'bused you, Dotty," cried Spotty, his big eyes popping as he backed close

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against the farthest wall of the tiny sitting-room.

“You have!” insisted Dotty. “’Nen she’ll begin on your legs. She’ll pull, an’ pull, an’ you’ll rattle an’ rattle. Mummy will hear you an’ she will cry, ‘Good for such a bad bird!’ An’ your new frog Mummy will keep right on pulling, until she pulls your little bit o’ short kingfisher legs into grea’ long frog legs. ’Nen when you want to go anywhere you’ll have to hop along on the ground, but you can always look up an’ see me flying around among the tree tops! An’ every time you stick your head above the water, a boy-animal will try to catch you an’ tear off your legs to fry for his supper.”

Spotty shivered in silent terror.

“An’ then,” continued Dotty, gloating over her success, “she’ll take a grea’ big stone an’ beat you until your back is all greenery-yellow, an’ she’ll make you lie on

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a stone in the sun until it burns, an' burns your tummy all yellery-green. 'Nen she'll throw you into awful cold water an' she'll make you sit an' sing, 'P-u-r-t! P-u-r-t! P-u-r-t!' all the whole night long; but you'll know I am sound asleep in our cradle, tucked safe an' warm against Mummy's breast."

"Urrrrrrrrrrrr, Dotty!" wailed Spotty.

That gave Dotty inspiration for a climax.

"An' then," she concluded with a flourish, "boy-animals will catch you with a net sticked 'way down in the water where you can't ever hide from it. They will run a big, sharp hook under your chin, up through your mouth and out of your nose, and put you into the river for fish bait. You'll see a grea' big catfish, long as our hall, an' all slickery black an' yellow, with big, sharp horns, coming straight at you, an' he'll see you an' stop. He'll think, 'How nice an' fat that frog seems! B'lieve I'll eat him!'

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Nen that catfish will bite you dreffully an' swallow you very slow, like Mummy sees 'em do at the river every day. An' she'll see it eat you an' she won't ever care."

Spotty sent up a rattle of anguish.

"Dotty! Spotty! You'll have that boy-animal after us again! If you don't stop your noise I'll put both of you into the cradle and cover you until you half smother," threatened Mother Minnie from the front door. "Dotty, I believe it is you teasing again. For shame! To seem so nice and then be forever naughty. Kiss your dear little nest-mate on the spot!"

"Which spot?" questioned Dotty.

"The little white one before one of his eyes."

So Dotty gave Spotty a little peck, without any love in it, and they snuggled into the fish bone cradle side by side, but Spotty looked steadily at Dotty with his big re-

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proachful eyes, until he made her squirm. At last he told her, very close to her ear and quite softly, "I want you to be a beau'ful bird an' fly to the river an' go fishing. I wouldn't ever push you into the water to be made into a old croaky frog."

Dotty wavered and was lost.

"Spotty, I was 'ist p'tendin'. I ain't going to push you, really."

"Then," answered Spotty, with large forgiveness, "you may rest your bill across my neck."

CHAPTER IV

HOW SLIVERS SHEILPOKE GOT HIS SLICKER

WHILE he was raising his first family after the flood, Slivers Sheilpoke worked as never before in his life. He recognized the supreme importance of that brood. To raise them was his only chance of keeping his family alive on the earth. So he and his mate agreed that she should remain in their sitting-room all the time and he should provide for the entire family. This meant that Slivers' usual work would be doubled, and that he would spend most of his time in the water, because he waded and dived for almost every bite they ate. There never was time to dry his coat from

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one plunge, until he was compelled to take another in order to stop the hunger cries of his four long, skinny, big-beaked youngsters.

Soon he grew so water-soaked and his muscles became so strained in flight with wet pinions that he decided to take a trip to the head of the lake and consult Dr. Wood Duck, who, although a notorious quack, was yet the best physician among the birds. Slivers had not the slightest intention of paying a bill if he could avoid it. He was kept too busy to suit him providing worms, frogs and minnows for his family; so he pretended that he had seen the doctor accidentally and stopped for a friendly visit. He waded among the water grasses calling, "Good swimming, Dr. Duck! Hope you are finding yourself in fine feather this sun-up!"

"Slick as grease," quacked Doc, mightily

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pleased to have a caller who did not want a prescription for lice, gastritis, poison, traps or guns.

“That’s the truth!” cried Slivers, envious as possible, for Doc dived after a worm and arose to the surface without a wet feather on him. “How, on water, do you keep your coat so dry?”

“Keep it well oiled,” quacked Doc. “But if you think my suit is waterproof, you should see my cousin Canvas Back.”

“Has he a better coat than you?”

“He is always dry as punk,” quacked Doc.

“I am going to hunt him up and offer him ten beakfuls of worms for enough canvas to cover my back.”

“Qua! Qua!” laughed Doc. “He won’t spare you any. He is a perfect miser with his canvas. He sticks closer to it than anything else on water. The best thing for you to do is to use your grease bottle liberally

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on your coat and so make a slicker for yourself."

"But I do!" complained Slivers. "Seems to me as if I spend half my time oiling, and yet I am always water soaked."

"Let me have a look at your grease bottle," quacked Doc, his professional instincts rising so that he forgot about Slivers paying a social call.

"Couk! Couk!" cried Slivers in delight, for he thought he was going to get what he wanted without depositing even one worm on Doc's bill. So he waded a little deeper, stood his feathers on end and Doc examined his grease bottle.

"Quack! Quack!" cried Doc. "There has been a miscarriage here. Your grease bottle is not half large enough for a wader and diver, with such a heavy coat of long hairy feathers. We must aid nature. You must take some oil and soak your feathers

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completely in it and then sit in the sun and dry them carefully. Then you will have as good a slicker as any of us."

"But where will I find the oil?" inquired Slivers so eagerly that Doc realized the fact that he was being fooled into giving a free prescription.

"How do I know?" answered Doc. "I have told you what you need, it is your look-out to find it. The world is full of oil. You should be able to secure plenty somewhere."

Slivers saw that he had all that he was going to get for nothing, so he began telling Doc how smart his nestlings were, what a beautiful mate he had, how he admired the feather-bed she had made for her family, how Blue Heron was gobbling every frog on the lake shore, that it was his firm conviction that Wood Picker was abusing his family, and that Night Hawk went out for no good. After he had done all he could to make his

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visit appear as a friendly call he bade Wood Duck good feeding, and leisurely waded from sight. Then he took wing and every spare minute between providing meals for his family he hunted oil.

But in the beginning, so soon after the flood, there was no oil floating on the water, as there is in these days. Poor Slivers searched for oil instead of food for himself, until he became slim as King Rail. All sun-up Slivers hunted oil. All moon-up Slivers searched and dreamed of oil. Every sleek, finely feathered bird he passed in flight, he stopped and wanted to know if its grease bottle furnished all the oil it used or whether it had got some from outside sources, and if it had, where he could secure some. He became such a nuisance that the remainder of the birds, every one of whom was extremely busy and anxious over keeping its family

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safely, in order to perpetuate its kind, flew a mile from their courses to avoid him.

One sun, Slivers had stuffed his mate and family and was out hunting oil. On the Lake Shore Flight, he met Black Bird, whose exquisite gleaming slicker filled him with envy.

“Well I’ll be shot!” cried Silvers, “I never saw anything so fine as your coat! Tailor Bird must have used especial care. It fits to perfection and shines as the sun. What feathering do you use?”

“Oil,” answered Black Bird.

“You must have beakfuls and beakfuls,” suggested Slivers, “to shine as you do.”

“I have all I need,” responded Black Bird.

“But have you more than you need!” eagerly questioned Slivers. “I know where there is an old, rotten log, filled with the biggest, creamiest grubs you ever saw. I’ll

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trade you all you can swallow at one feed for a beakful of your oil."

"Whose beak; yours or mine?" inquired Black Bird.

"Mine, of course!" answered Slivers.

"Trap me!" cried Black Bird. "T'check! T'check!" And he sprained his wings flying for Black Bird settlement, at Cat-tail corner.

"Something seems to check me every time I have struck oil," lamented Slivers.

"Kut, kut, kut!" laughed a passing Robin Redbreast. He perched on a limb and held his sides with his wing butts. "That is what the man-animal calls a joke. Kip! Kip! Kip! I think that is awfully clever!"

"Slivers doesn't seem to agree with you," suggested King Bird whose sitting-room was close.

"Why they never did!" answered Robin innocently. Then King Bird and his mate

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began to laugh. Robin jumped six inches from the limb crying, "Kut! Kut! Kut! If I haven't made one myself!"

Slivers took wing. He was completely discouraged about finding oil. So he began to plan some other method by which he could come into possession of a waterproof coat. As nature had failed him, he decided that he would try until he secured one himself. Early next morning while fishing at the Lake Shore Crossing he saw Mud Turtle hunting frogs among the reeds, and as he watched he had an idea.

"Good hunting, Mud!" he called.

"If I had legs as long as yours, a beak as long as my legs, and frogs lived in deep-water, maybe it would be," answered Mud, crossly.

"I shall be pleased to have you lunch with me," Slivers told him. "I have heaps of the finest grubs you ever tasted in cold storage,

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and I shall be glad to share my treat with you."

"Thank you kindly," replied Mud. "I shall be delighted. But you will have to bring the treat here. I can't leave the water."

"You must, if you lunch on grubs," Slivers replied. "They are in my refrigerating log and it would take me all sun-up to carry enough here a beakful at a time, to fill your shell. You can come easily. It is only a short way."

"I don't like to leave home," objected Mud.

"I am mighty sorry," replied Slivers. "I know you would enjoy a feast of grubs; but perhaps your cousin—Snapping Turtle—will make just as entertaining a guest."

"Lead the way," commanded Mud. "Really, I cannot resist."

Slivers walked far enough ahead that there was no chance for Mud to do any back-

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biting, entered his cold storage room, brought out a big fat grub, and dropped it on a toad-stool before Mud. He took it at a snap, blinked his little yellow eyes and smiled from ear to ear.

“Ever taste anything better than that?” questioned Slivers.

“I never did,” answered Mud.

“Then walk right in and eat your fill,” urged Slivers.

Mud looked at him as if he thought him loony and hurried to the mouth of the log. His shell was much wider than the opening and although he squeezed and clawed and crowded, he could not enter. Then Slivers stook back, and he grinned from ear to ear.

“I can’t get in,” groaned Mud. “What shall I do?”

“Come out of your shell,” answered Slivers. “Then you can hump your back and enter easily.”

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“But I never in all my life left my shell,” quavered Mud. “If I leave it and anything happens to it, I soon should become so water-soaked I should die. I can’t possibly do it.”

“It seems as if it would be the easiest thing in the world for you to slip from it,” commented Slivers, trying to hide his eagerness. “There is no possible danger. I am right here to watch it.”

Mud was crazy for the grubs and that settled it. For the first time in his life he came out of his shell, puffing and struggling, and humping his soft pink back he hurried into the log and began snapping up grubs for dear life.

The instant he went from sight, Slivers began trying to put on Mud’s coat. With all his might he tried to force his beak through the shell and out of the opening for the head, his wings through the place for the fore legs, and his legs through the other

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openings. He worked and tugged and struggled; but his breast bone was so deep he could not force it inside the narrow shell. Jim Crow saw him while sailing overhead and immediately paused to investigate. When he realized that Slivers was trying so wear Mud's shell, he almost went into convulsions.

"Caw, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" he cried. "Shoot me! Trap me! Poison me! But that is the funniest sight I ever saw! Caw! Caw! But I'm laughing like a crazy Loon. Oh, what a spectacle for the eyes! Wait until I meet the other birds! Caw, ha, ha, ha!"

As soon as Slivers knew that he was discovered, he gave up trying to put on Mud's waterproof coat, and at the same instant he realized that Mud was emptying his store-room while he had nothing to pay him for the loss of his best provisions.

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“Mud! Mud!” he cried. “Come quickly! Here is Jim Crow trying to steal your shell.”

Mud came scrambling from the log. To see him in his bare skin was a sight. Jim Crow almost split his throat cawing. It was a mercy to Mud that things happened as they did, for if he had eaten a few more grubs he never could have entered his shell again. As it was, he struggled with all his might and at last forced himself in, although he puffed in rolls at every opening. Then he turned turtle and went humping for the water as fast as ever he could, which was not half quick enough to suit him.

After that experience Slivers gave up hunting a slicker and tried to make oil to use on the coat he had. He pulled the fattest angle worms from the mud, and picked the creamiest grubs from the banks and tried to fry them on a flat rock in the sun.

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But all of them dried up like little twigs so that plan had to be abandoned.

One sun he was flying down the Lake Shore Air Line, wet as a drowned rat, and feeling very downhearted, when he noticed a little path leading from the woods to the lake shore,—a path that had been used until it was smooth and hard. While his eyes were popping with fear, he followed it and learned that if you seek long enough, some sun, somewhere you are going to find the thing for which you are searching. That path led straight to a depression in a big stone, filled with pure, clean, golden oil.

“Couk, Couk, Couk!” cried Slivers and then remembered that he should have been still as a mouse, so he stood staring and trembling with delight. This appeared to be his chance. A nicer bathing place could not have been imagined, and there was enough oil to make the finest possible slicker

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for himself, his mate and all their brood, so that all Sheilpokes of the future would pip their shells to an inheritance of a waterproof coat. But how did that oil happen to be there and to whom did it belong? Slivers had prospected for oil long enough to know that it is not going to waste anywhere. It belonged to someone and was, no doubt, for some especial purpose. Slivers never was so tempted in all his life as he was to wade in and take his bath, immediately. But he feared the owner might be secreted among the bushes or in the trees, so he hid himself and watched the oil, until he became so sleepy he scarcely could keep his eye on it. He knew his mate and young would be hungry, but he was there at sunset, and still watching when the moon was high. At last he heard a soft pattering of cushioned feet and a queer grunting, sniffing noise, and with his heart beating wildly he leaned to look.

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Down the path waddled old Father Raccoon, and like a flash of lightning it dawned on Slivers, that the pool contained the fat with which he would line his ribs, and those of his family, for their long Winter sleep, and he only left his hollow tree home at night. Was there ever better luck?

“Couk! Couk! Couk!” cried Slivers, forgetting all caution in his delight. Then he trembled with the fear that Father Raccoon would grow suspicious and move his reservoir, until he almost fell off his perch. Father Raccoon sat on his haunches and looked all around, growling mighty fierce and mad-like.

“Who’s that?” he cried angrily.

Slivers almost shook off his feathers, but he remained quiet.

“Who’s there?” he cried again, fiercer and madder.

Slivers was afraid to keep still any longer

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so he muttered through his nose, all so sleepy like, "Cooou-ow-oooh-uwk!"

"Snouff, Snouff," growled Father Raccoon. "Slivers Sheilpoke, is it? What's the matter? Have you a frog in your throat?"

"Blue Heron wouldn't be guilty of leaving a frog for anyone else," mumbled Slivers, catching at the idea. "I swallowed a crayfish and the bones are giving me the night-hawk."

"Snouff, Snouff, I should think so," answered Father Raccoon. "Why don't you regurgitate them?"

"Coo-cou-oooh-hoo-uwak! Don't you hear me trying to?" answered Slivers, pretending to choke until he strangled in reality.

"I will tell you what to do," ordered father Raccoon, most peremptory like. "This is a mighty unhealthful location for strangers,

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and no doubt you will choke to death, or die in some other tragic manner if you remain here. You are half night-bird, and you can see plenty well. You hurry straight home and have your mate run her bill down your throat and pull out the bone. And after this always stay at home while your food is digesting, and you will have help close if you get into trouble. Mind you remember!"

"My life preserver!" cried Silvers. "Thank you mightily! You have saved me.—And made me more comfortable than I ever was before,—I hope," he added softly. Then he flew a bee line for home.

With his mate and his gawky brood in their first flight, Silvers returned to the stone at daybreak. They bathed and soaked in that oil. Then they perched on the topmost limbs of a big tree and waited for the sun to dry it in, and then they went back and repeated the operation.

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Next moon time Father Raccoon came to his reservoir with more fat to store away and found the pool empty, and wiped dry. There were a few feathers sticking to the sides of the stone. Angry enough to kill, he took them and went to the lake and called Dr. Duck.

“Doc, whose feathers are these?” he asked.

Doc examined the feathers carefully and could not tell to save his neck.

“Why do you wish to know?” he quacked.

“They are feathers that fell from the coat of some bird that found my storehouse and stole every speck of the fat I was collecting to line my ribs against snow time,” answered Father Raccoon. “And if I ever catch that bird, believe me, I will make the feathers fly!”

“Quack, quack!” laughed Doc. “Was there ever anything easier than being a spec-

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ialist? Those feathers are from the suit of Slivers Sheilpoke and without a doubt he took your oil to make him a slicker. He visited me not long ago to find out how to make his coat waterproof."

"Snouff, snouff!" growled Father Raccoon, mad-like as possible. "He never will call upon you again if I get a chance to set my teeth in him. He was perching close to my reservoir last moon up, and I heard him make a noise and allowed him to fool me with the story that he was choking on a crayfish bone. Snouff, snouff, but he is a dead bird!"

Next sun-up, Slivers, scouting around the lake shore, dry as punk and happy as a clam, paused to take a fair aim at a young Bull Frog, and heard an unusual clamor among the birds of the location. He swallowed the frog and then crept closer to find Jim Crow telling all the other birds how he had

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seen Mud Turtle come out of his shell. Slivers sailed among them and taking a prominent perch he listened to the story in silence, occasionally adjusting his shining new slicker while the other birds cried, screamed and hooted at him in derision. When Jim finished at last and the birds finally grew quiet enough that he could be heard, he yawned indifferently and remarked; "My friends and relatives: All our lives all of us have heard traditions of the elegant and accomplished Lyre Bird. Permit me now to have the high honor of presenting him to you."

With a sweep of his wings toward Jim Crow, Slivers sailed away, and the scream and cries that followed him were not at his expense.

CHAPTER V

WHY THE LOONS WENT CRAZY

“QUA, QUA!” laughed Little Duck.
“Isn’t water good?”

“Bestest of anything,” answered Littlest Duck.

“If I didn’t have all the water I wanted to paddle and swim in,” quacked Little Duck, skimming over the surface like wind-driven down, “I’d go crazy and be put in the ’Sylum with the Loons.”

“Why did they put the Loons in the ’Sylum?” asked Littlest Duck, coming up from a dive with a worm and a weed in his bill.

“Good water! Don’t your muvver explain noffin?” cried Little Duck, paddling near

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and tugging at the weed in the hope that he would secure the worm also.

“She didn’t displain that,” answered Littlest Duck, hurriedly gobbling half the weed in his efforts to save the worm. “You quack about it.”

“Qua, qua,” began Little Duck, spinning after a water-fairy as he saw the worm disappear. “It was at the time of the grea’ awful big water, and it rained, and it rained. And it rained until the water came up, and came higher than annyfing; came up the highest ever. And before it got the very highest ever, a man, and his mate and his brood went into a grea’ big boat. They took a pair of every bird, and every animal, ’ist all every kind there was; and first of all they took the water birds, ’cos the higher the water got, the more room they’d have to swim away, and the less land the others would have to run on, qua, qua!”

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Little Duck paused to wet his flat, yellow bill and Littlest Duck floated near him in wide-eyed interest.

“And after they got all, ’ist every kind there was, why then there was *one* kind they didn’t have, ’cos that was the Loons, and they liked the water so well they ’ist *wouldn’t* leave it. The man tried and tried and he said, ‘Verily, I fail to catch those divey, swimmy, water birds.’

“And his mate said, ‘They are so beholden to the lakes I fear thou must go in the boat and take thy nets.’

“So the man and some of his brood taked a great big boat and they tangled those Loons in the nets and ’ist fished them from the water, and then they put them in a little dark place with ’ist *sand* under their feet and ’ist little teeny bit of water, only to *drink*; nuffin to splash their feet in, or bathe, or get things to eat from, ’ist only to *drink*.

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“Muvver Loon, she get so mad she beat her head, and flap her wings and scream; ’ist scream and scream fit to kill herself, only no one can’t *hear* her, ’cos there was all the land birds, and all the tree birds, and all the water birds, and all the animals coming into the boat, and all at the same time the Lion roar, ‘Arraugh, arraugh, arraugh,’ and the Tiger scream, ‘Erough, erough, erough,’ and the Sea-lion bellow, ‘O ough, ough, ough,’ and all the birds ’ist cry, and chip, and chatter and chirp ’bout leaving the trees, and the land, and the water, and old Muvver Loon she was screaming worse than any one of them; but she ’ist *can’t* scream louder than all the others put together.

“And, yes, old Father Loon, he scream too, loud as ever he can and when that doesn’t do a bit of good, old Muvver Loon get madder yet and she fly at that little bit of water and *spill* it. Then she slap her feet and

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sousle her head in it, and her head get all sand and there ain't any more water to wash it clean. Nen when old Favver Loon go to slap *his* feet, and sousle *his* head, there ain't any water and he go away to the darkest corner and cry. That make Muvver Loon feel so bad she 'ist beat her *head*, and her wings, 'til they're all bloody, 'ist all red bloody; and the rain it come down, and come down, and come down on the boat, and the water it go washing by, and washing by, all round them, and they can *hear* it, 'ist *all the time they hear it!*'

"Quack, quack, quack!" sobbed Littlest Duck in sympathy.

"And old Muvver Loon, she won't *eat* nuffin 'tall hardly, 'cos she like *wet* things, and *green* things, and *wormy* things. And she can't hardly get her bill and feet wet, 'for the water all gone 'til next sun-up, every bit gone, and her bill

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and tongue get *all yellow*, and her feet and legs *all yellow*, and the skin 'tween her toes *all dry*, and her crop draw 'way inside her, and her feathers feel all *pullery* and *stickery*, and she 'ist *perfectly mizzable*.

“Old Favver Loon, he more mizzable an she is, 'cos she take most all of the little bit of water. He 'ist lay on the boat bottom and *dry up*, 'ist dry up 'til he's only bones and feathers, 'cos he wants water so *bad*. Muvver Loon, after she scream 'til she can't scream another scream, why nen she lay down and dry up too, and all the time the rain 'ist *pour* down, right close above them, and the water 'ist *gurgle*, and *sousle*, and *splash* all round them.

“Muvver and Favver Loon, they're so tired they 'ist think they'll *die*, they get so worse mizzable they beat their heads, and try to dive through the boat bottom, and try to kill themselves, 'cos they're burning up and

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all the time the water splashin' all round, 'ist *everywhere*, except where they is, quack, quack!"

"Nen one sun-up, why the rain it *quit*. Then the water go down, and go down 'til the trees and the land stick through and the boat stop. The man let all and everything come from the boat and go away, and all of them 'ist tickled most to death to get back to the land and the water. And when everything come out and go away, why the man he says, 'Has everything come forth?' And his mate say, 'Didst thou see the Loons? They rebelled worst of all. Thou wilt be forced to carry them forth.'

"So the man go to the boat, and there lay the Loons 'ist so near dead they don't know the other birds are gone, and he picked them up by the wings and carry them out and set them beside the water. And they 'ist *sit* there, 'cos they so dried up they can't tell

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'tis water, quack, quack! Then old Muvver Loon she 'ist think *maybe* it's water, and she reach out and slap one foot, soft and easy, and it *splash* like water. Nen old Favver Loon he reach out and slap one foot, 'ist like she do, and it *do* splash like water. Then old Muvver Loon she slap the other foot, and she think it *act* like water; so Favver Loon slap his other foot, *real hard* and he 'ist *sure* it's water. Then old Muvver Loon she reach over and stick in her head and sousle it round and it feel so *wet*, and so *cool*, and so *good*, she 'ist most *know* it's *got* to be water, and she look at Favver Loon so 'sprised like, and nen she sit back on her tail and begin to laugh and cry.

“Then Favver Loon sousle *his* head, and it feel so wet and fine, he sit back on his tail and laugh and cry worser than she do. Nen they 'ist let go and slide into the water,

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splash! and bathe their skins, and soak their feet, and dip their heads, and wet their feathers, and drink, and *drink*, and gobble some fat juicy worms and get some green weeds with them, and then they 'ist *know* it's *got* to be *real*, for *sure enough* water, and they so glad they 'ist *cry*, and *laugh*, and *scream*, and they 'ist go clear *crazy* over that water. Nen they dive away off, and there ain't no man ever going to catch them *again*, quack, quack!

“And the man say, ‘Didst thou ever behold anything so crazy as those Loons?’”

“And his mate say, ‘Verily I never, never did. And they are the only pair left to multiply and replenish the earth so I fear after this all of the Loons will be crazy;’ and they always have and *that's* the reason they put them in the 'Sylum.’”

“Quack, quack, that's enough to make any

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water bird go crazy” quacked Littlest Duck.
“It would ’ist *kill* me.”

“Quack, quack! Me too,” agreed Little Duck.

THE END

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